

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 4305

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR, MO (MENJELLOUN, ALI)
SUBJECT: NOMINATION OF ALI BENJELLOUN AS MOROCCAN UN PERM REP

1. ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 7, KING HASSAN II NAMED ALI BENJELLOUN AS THE NEW MOROCCAN PERM REP TO THE UN REPLACING DRISS SLAOUL. FOLLOWING HIS LONG, ROLLER-COASTER CAREER INCLUDING AN EARLIER SACKING ON GROUNDS OF CORRUPTION, THE NOMINATION IS SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE. A COMPETENT LAWYER, BENJELLOUN'S MAIN CONTRIBUTION IS LIKELY TO BE TO REINFORCE THE LEGAL CREDENTIALS OF THE MOROCCAN UN DELEGATION.

2. BIOGRAPHY: BORN AUGUST 17, 1927 IN FEZ, BENJELLOUN DID HIS SECONDARY STUDIES AT THE LYCEE MOULAY IDRIS IN FEZ AND DID JURIDICAL STUDIES AT THE FACULTY OF LAW IN PARIS. IN 1950 HE WAS ADMITTED TO THE CASABLANCA BAR AND AT INDEPENDENCE ASSUMED THE FUNCTIONS OF DIRECTOR OF THE CABINET OF THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE IN THE GOVERNMENTS OF BEKKAI, BALAFREJ, ABDULLAH IBRAHIM AND THE ROYAL GOVERNMENT FORMED IN 1960. IN 1958 DURING LITIGATION BETWEEN MOROCCO AND FRANCE OVER THE LATTER'S SEIZURE OF BEN BELLA, BENJELLOUN SERVED IN LEGAL CAPACITY AT GENEVA. BENJELLOUN ALSO BECAME DIRECTOR OF THE COURTS AND MOROCCAN TRIBUNES FOR FRENCH PERSONNEL IN
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1959 AS WELL AS DIRECTOR OF CRIMINAL AFFAIRS AND PARDONS.

BENJELLOUN WAS NAMED SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE IN JULY 1960 AND IN NOVEMBER 1960 WAS NOMINATED TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL AND ELECTED ITS VICE PRESIDENT IN JANUARY 1961. IN MARCH 1961, BENJELLOUN WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION OF ACCOUNTS. THEN IN JANUARY 1962 HE WAS MADE AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES WHERE HE ENJOYED GREAT POPULARITY IN WASHINGTON SOCIAL CIRCLES. IN JULY 1965 HE WAS NAMED DIRECTOR OF THE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT CHERIFIEN OFFICE OF PHOSPHATES (OCP) WHICH HE HELD UNTIL MAY 1967 WHEN HE BECAME MINISTER OF JUSTICE. THAT SAME YEAR HE WAS SENT ON A MISSION TO THE VATICAN BY THE KING IN RELATION TO MIDDLE EAST AND ALSO REPRESENTED MOROCCO AT THAT YEAR'S OAU SUMMIT IN KINSHASA.

3. HOWEVER, IN DECEMBER 1967 BENJELLOUN WAS FIRED ABRUPTLY AS MINISTER OF JUSTICE WITH THE IMPLICATION OF WRONG-DOING ON HIS PART WHILE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF OCP. IT WAS CONSIDERED HIGHLY UNUSUAL AT THAT TIME FOR A CABINET MINISTER TO BE PUBLICLY DISMISSED BY THE KING EVEN IF HIS MALFEASANCE WAS WIDELY KNOWN. THERE WERE SOME CONCURRENT REPORTS THAT BENJELLOUN'S OFFENSE WAS NOT SO MUCH GRAFT AS LESE-MAJESTE FOR HIS HAVING SIGNED A CONTRACT WITH A "FORCE MAJEURE" CLAUSE IN IT CONTAINING STANDARD ARCHAIC PHRASING REFERRING TO "INSURRECTION OR RESTRAINT OF PRINCES OR RULERS." FOR WHATEVER REASON, BENJELLOUN WAS OSTRACIZED FOR TWO YEARS WHILE HE MADE DESULTORY EFFORTS TO PRACTICE LAW IN CASABLANCA.

4. BY 1974 THERE WERE RUMORS THAT BENJELLOUN HAD RECOUPED TO THE POINT WHERE HE WAS UNDERCONSIDERATION FOR PRIME MINISTER. HIS APPOINTMENT AS UN PERM REP, HOWEVER, IS THE FIRST CONCRETE MANIFESTATION OF HIS FULL REHABILITATION.

5. HE IS A FORMER ISTIQLALI, NOW BELIEVED TO BE INDEPENDENT. HE HAS A BEAUTIFUL WIFE, THE DAUGHTER OF A FRENCH MOTHER AND MOROCCAN FATHER, AND HAS TWO CHILDREN. BENJELLOUN LIKES TO SMOKE AND DRINK. THE NEW APPOINTEE IS HIGHLY APPRECIATIVE OF FRENCH CULTURE AND TENDS TO BE SOMEWHAT FORMAL IN MANNER.

6. COMMENT: BENJELLOUN AS FORMER AMBASSADOR TO US
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(1962-1965) SHOULD HAVE MANY CONTACTS REMAINING IN THE DEPARTMENT, US BUREAUCRACY, AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR. HE IS A HIGHLY INTELLIGENT MAN, WITH A WELL-TRAINED LEGAL MIND WHICH IS UNDOUBTEDLY GOING TO BE PUT TO PRIMARY USE IN DEFENDING MOROCCO'S ACQUISITION OF THE SAHARA. HIS APPOINTMENT IS REPORTEDLY THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF LONG-RUMORED SHIFTS DUE IN MOROCCAN DIPLOMATIC POSTINGS.

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